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**APPROACHES TO EFFECTIVE POPULAR THEATRE:
HISTORY, PRACTICE, THEORY AND A CASE IMPLEMENTATION**

by

Peter D. Little

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Thesis

**submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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Abstract

A theatre created by the middle class, or one that caters to its tastes, will usually strive to reinforce the society as it is. If theatre is to be an agent for change in a society, that wishes to change the structures of power, it will have to come from a different source than the middle class, or from a different attitude within it. Popular theatre, because it relies on analysis done by the people for whom a changed society seems beneficial can be such an agent for change.

The goals for groups using popular theatre can be as varied as the groups who use the medium. It is their situation, examined with their traditions, that leads to their unique goal.

This thesis first examines the practices of three popular theatre groups: Theatre of the Oppressed, Sistren and The Mumpers Troupe. The aims are to explore and examine: 1) how each group works; 2) how, or if, these groups can facilitate without imposing their own opinions on the people with whom they work; and 3) the effectiveness of their work.

In the light of this examination, the thesis then describes and critically analyses a project involving twelve adolescent participants and the author, as facilitator, which was designed to accomplish the goals of popular theatre as defined in the thesis. Some preliminary conclusions concerning popular theatre are then drawn.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis begins with an outline of the history of theatre as it spawned investigations and experiments which evolved into what many people now refer to as “popular theatre”. This term, although it has many connotations, is defined for this thesis as theatrical techniques used to analyse social situations (stations), theorize solutions and create presentations for and by people who tend to be near the bottom of structures of power within a society. These structures of power are well described by John Fiske who points out,

“The power-bloc, then, is not even a category of people. It is a disposition and exercise of power to which certain social formations defined primarily by class, race, gender and ethnicity, have privileged access and which they can readily turn to their own economic and political interests.”(10)

Popular theatre works against these interests to create what Brazilian-born educator Paulo Freire (1921-1999) refers to as conscientization and praxis. Conscientization may be defined succinctly as, “ a process of developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality (Taylor 52). Praxis, is defined, again by Taylor, as it relates to Freire, “Freire is clear in stating that praxis can be defined as the action and reflection of people upon their world in order to transform it” (Taylor 56). These two terms operate within a society where Fiske, as an extension of Foucault’s theories on power, points out that,

“Power, then, is a systematic set of operations which works to ensure the maintenance of the social order...and ensure its smooth running...’The people’ are those who benefit least and are disciplined most by the power system.”(11)

Fiske goes on to posit the concept of the equivalent opposites of 'station' and 'locale'. A 'station' is a physical and social position imposed upon an individual by the power-bloc in opposition to a 'locale' which is created by a bottom-up exercise of localising power (Fiske 12). Popular theatre is one method for adjusting of people's station into their locale in a process of their own agency. To act as their own agents of change in contest with other agents, often top-down, of change can be liberating. Conscientization and praxis within peoples' station helps to create a locale and is the basis of a broadly-based sociology that seeks to understand a society in order to transform it. This thesis and the popular theatre project it describes is a small part of that sociology.

The thesis then proceeds to examine the methods of a theorist, and practitioner, as well as the practices of two groups using popular theatre. The Brazilian-born theorist, Augusto Böal (1931-), was chosen because he is the most widely known theorist and practitioner of theatre as social action. As Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz state:

[E]ducators, political activists, therapists and social workers devoted to critical thought and action have adapted [Boal's] work to address issues ranging from racism and sexism to loneliness and political impotence. Having won acclaim for its social relevance and adaptability, the work has entered global circulation...(Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1)

I have also had experience working with Boal which allowed me to compare the theory in its written form and the actual practice by its author.

The practising groups were chosen for two reasons. The first is that they both use Böal as a resource to varying degrees. The second is that they use different approaches. On the one hand, The Mummer's Troupe created plays, in a sensitive way, for people. In other words, they act on the people's behalf without usurping (de-contextualizing) their stories but

by presenting them for the people and helping to spread them among a wider audience. Sistren, on the other hand, is composed of the people for whom it works. They cannot usurp the stories from themselves and they are in control of the process at all times. At least, if they don't have control of the process neither does anyone else.

After making the reader aware of the differences and similarities of these approaches, I propose a method to assure that the people dictate the process and direction of any project based on the ideas of popular theatre. This is not to suggest a belief in a universal method. In fact, it is to point out the need to avoid just such a belief and to create a set of principles that will make sure that each project, while having similarities, will be created by the people using it and therefore be both appropriate and unique.

The following historical review is derived predominantly from Joan Riday's Masters thesis (1992) and conversations with her. It is not intended to be an exhaustive account, but to show that popular theatre has a historical basis or context; it too does not exist in a vacuum. It also serves to trace the evolution of my thinking that led to the project around which this thesis is centred.

Throughout the history of theatre the changes have been predominantly of style not substance, and while audiences have at times been 'the people in the market place', more regularly theatre has been sponsored by people who control, or try to control, their society: religious institution or monarchs and aristocracies. Theatre, like most high-brow forms of art, was a popular art form made as we now say "legitimate" by people who control societies and then portrayed as examples of the magnificence to which art could be raised. The often unsaid completion of that idea may be, "once it is wrested from the control of the great

unwashed.” Popular theatre is an attempt to bring this art back to the people to enable them to see how high they can elevate themselves.

Although in the past theatre audiences have come from different sectors of society, fundamental change in purpose and the conscious quest to broaden the audience have been a late nineteenth and early twentieth century phenomenon. These changes were at least a re-emergence, but more probably the beginning of theatre for people and action. With the birth of artistic realism common people came into the novel as well as on to the stage. The protagonists were ordinary people involved in extraordinary events, and the audience was to be those same people. This broadening of artistic subject matter created many new attempts at form, style, content and purpose. David Bradby (in Riday 17) writes,

[I]n 1890, Bruno Wille called for a Free People's Theatre in Berlin to provide theatre seats for the workers at prices they could afford and at special performances to which they could go with their with families.

The period 1900 to 1940 was one of severe social, political and artistic upheaval. In the theatre, the first person to capitalize on this new mood was Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940). To paraphrase Edward Braun, though Meyerhold created a stylized theatre that was "absolutely anti-political"; that changed somewhat when he entered an association with the poet Mayakovsky (Riday 10).

He [Meyerhold] opened his newly-formed Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic Theatre in Moscow on the third anniversary of the Revolution with *The Dawn* ...depicting the transformation of a capitalist war into an international proletarian uprising.(Riday 13)

In 1922, Meyerhold became Director of the State Higher Theatre Workshop in Moscow:

[W]e wanted...to lay the foundation for a new kind of theatre requiring neither an illusionistic set nor complicated properties, theatre which could get along with the simplest objects at hand and progress from the spectacle acted by professionals to the free play of workers during their free time. (Riday 14)

It is in this same light that practitioners of popular theatre, myself included, want people to have the experience of creating art or of observing art created by others in such a way as to foster conscientization in both actor and audience.

Between 1926 and 1930 Meyerhold and Mayakovsky produced the plays, *The Inspector General*, *The Bedbug* and *The Bathhouse*. With the two latter "which denounced the red tape and triviality that were undermining the heroic dreams of the revolution," Meyerhold and Mayakovsky began to attack the Government. "[B]y now [Mayakovsky] was very discouraged the regime could ever accomplish its original ideals" (Riday 16). Their theatre had been created to offer to the worker a theatre of art; they would not operate it as a tool of propaganda and political ideology. They had, however, created a theatre that did not belong to the upper classes or the status-quo.

During this same time in Germany, Erwin Piscator (1893-1966) began working with the *Proletarisches Theater*. The theatre committee included people from the Communist and Socialist parties and other working-class groups. Piscator used methods similar to those of Meyerhold, at least theatrically: in stylized performances where actors portrayed concepts more than people, representations of classes that were, "hard, unambiguous, unsentimental, intellectual"; Piscator's theatre was composed of "mainly amateur actors that toured working class districts performing mainly on improvised stages in beerhalls and workers' clubs" (Riday 17). Piscator's aims were: "Subordination of all artistic aims to the revolutionary goal: conscious emphasis on, and cultivation of, the idea of the class struggle" (Riday 18).

Piscator's theatre was to be artistic like Meyerhold's, but primarily a rational examination of how society operated and why it worked to the disadvantage of the working class.

By including social analysis, not just passive observation, as a consideration in the art of theatre, a polarity was created that continues within theatre. In many ways the people who comprise legitimate theatre today (actors, directors and critics) tend to disregard or denigrate overt, rational analysis in the presentation of a play as polemical. What remains to be done is to overcome this art versus thought dichotomy. However, the mainstream theatre remains under the control of those with economic or artistic power and they seem to have no desire to analyze and alter a society that works to their advantage. In short, a theatre that works toward conscientization works against their interests.

"The juxtaposition of factual material and dramatic action became a signatory feature of Piscator's work...the aim being to imply a relationship between stage action and a wider socio-political reality" (Riday 19). For example, in the play *Flags* "the true story tells what happens when a peaceful workers meeting is disturbed by police who have been bribed by a capitalist... [T]he labour leaders are arrested; one commits suicide in jail and the other four are hanged" (Riday 19).

Piscator began having trouble finding plays which appealed to both his sense of art and revolution. So much so that the committee of the *Volkbühne Theater* "was embarrassed by his seeming political ambivalence and he was eventually forced to resign" (Riday 21). He found when starting his next theatre, one that ironically was based in a bourgeois theatre, that:

a proletarian theatre presupposes that the proletariat has the means to support such a theatre and this presupposes that the proletariat has managed to make

itself into a dominant social and economic power. Until that happens our theatre can be no more than a revolutionary theatre which uses the means at its disposal for the ideological liberation of the proletariat which will free both the proletariat and the theatre of these contradictions. (Riday 21)

This problem is as true now as it was for Piscator and is expressed by many current practitioners. "Piscator's greatest achievement, however, was a Marxist achievement: he demonstrated how theatre can create a dialectical relationship with its audience in order to accelerate the transformation of society" (Riday 22). Piscator's and Meyerhold's similar approaches to creating a theatre which embodied both artistic and social considerations were the beginnings of the belief that theatre could enable the audience to think about what was happening on the stage and relate it directly to the process of their lives.

At about this same time Bertold Brecht (1896-1956) was creating "Epic Theatre". Meyerhold, Piscator and Brecht each added to theatre in their own way. I point this out not to diminish their accomplishments, but to acknowledge that none of these directors existed in an artistic or social vacuum. "Brecht subsumed three specific concerns: a) the unemotional approach, b) the new economic and social subject-matter, c) playing from memory, an unintended intention" (Riday 23). "Essentially, what Brecht created, after long experiment, was a dramatic form in which men [sic] were shown in the process of producing themselves and their situations" (Riday 24). The significance of this cannot be over-estimated.

Brecht was part of the vanguard of a new movement in theatre that was saying people were not just created by their society, but could recreate society and themselves. Furthermore, that was part of what theatre was capable of and should be doing. This is the most important aspect for theatre which increasingly became of and for the people. Brecht did not want a theatre full of empathetic teary eyed products. He wanted audiences to be analytical

self-creating people. He wanted his actors to portray characters in cold analytical terms, and his audience to be analytical, to understand the connection between what they were watching and their own lives. This eventually become the famous concept of "*Verfremdung*, which has been translated as 'estrangement', 'alienation', or 'disillusion' (less precisely); combined with the word *Effekt* it indicates 'the means by which an effect of alienation/estrangement could be achieved' (Riday 27).

[A]s a dramatic form, Brecht explains it is the sequence of scenes which are for themselves, sharp and isolated, yet connected in a pattern that defines the action...but is basically a movement corresponding to a flow of action--a process rather than a product. (Riday 27)

As Riday points out, "Meyerhold, Piscator and Brecht" worked within the confines of a collective, a collaborative community of artists who were dedicated to single purpose: theatre for the proletariat" (Riday 29).

In discussion with theatre directors and actors it becomes obvious that mainstream theatre, however, believes good theatre is above such considerations. It believes that while theatre is for everyone, not everyone wishes to attend. While the theatre community finds it easy to believe that politics is theatrical, they are less willing to recognize that theatre is political: not only what is on the stage, but also where the stage is, what is presented and how. If a play contends that the politics of our society is the cause of personal oppression, the critics most often will pronounce it polemical and lacking in artistic merit. The fact that mainstream theatre is itself polemical, albeit a polemic of the status quo, is either disputed or, more regularly, entirely ignored. Mainstream theatre wishes theatre and politics to be mutually exclusive.

Chris Brookes observes in *A Public Nuisance*, that the regional theatres of Canada do not draw from the local history, culture or artists but act as cultural colonizers, importing British, American or Torontonion values, writers, plays, and actors. Although it is forbidden entry, politics clearly surrounds our theatre. As Bennet points out: "It [cultural sociology] defines 'culture' as both the meanings and the values which arise among distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships" (in Riday 3). This is not the source of the musical *Cats*, or the play *King Lear*. While those may have merit, they should not be allowed to displace indigenous art. It is worth noting that two of the most well funded theatres in Canada produce, almost exclusively, plays written by dead Englishmen: The Shaw and Stratford Festivals.

Mainstream theatre is the property of the upper and middle classes and intellectuals and is presented in a venue and at a price for non-working class people (McGrath 5). It may be said that it is presented in such a way as to be relevant to people who are more self-determining than people of the lower classes. Paramount in my decision to work within the field of popular theatre is the desire to change this.

Chapter Two examines Augusto Böal's Theatre of the Oppressed as outlined in his book of the same name (1985). Böal is a contemporary starting point for two reasons. He has become a widely known practitioner and theorist of popular theatre and, consequently, is included in the resources of most current practitioners. I have participated in a workshop with him and have discussed his process with Canadian popular theatre facilitators currently using techniques similar to or drawn from his. It should not be misconstrued that Böal

invented all the techniques he speaks of and uses, but, he is one of the first to have written them down in a systematic way capable of being used as a resource.

Chapter Three examines the Mummies Troupe and the work they did in Newfoundland from the early 1970s. Chapter Four examines the work of the Sistren Collective in Jamaica and their work and methods from 1977 until the present.

After reviewing and critically analysing previous and contemporary work, I present in Chapter Five, a potentially more effective method of working with people in the medium of popular theatre. Effective in this case means: not imposing the facilitator's views on a group; allowing people to tell their own stories in their own ways; creating audiences where there were none before, either by locale or demographics; and finding a means of presentation that is appealing, not simply proselytizing.

Mainstream theatre regularly adopts people and concepts from its fringes, where people tend to be more experimental. Therefore, a new paradigm for theatre based on the celebration of the differences of peoples and regions as portrayed in their own theatre work can be created. By creating theatre in this way, bottom up not top down, a truly regional and popular theatre can emerge. We do not exist as a country in spite of our differences, culturally or individually, we exist because of them.

The central motivating concern of this thesis comes from personal experience that some groups using popular theatre are creating or reinforcing the very problems that they are trying to help people overcome. There is little doubt that groups using popular theatre intend what each sees as the betterment of the people with whom they are working. However, in striving for methods that can be universally applied, these methods have become the ends

rather than the means. The people then must fit the methods instead of the other way round. This, of course, is the very problem that popular theatre hopes to empower people against: being forced to fit their 'station', instead of creating their 'locale'. It is ironic to note that mainstream theatre has seemingly always striven to remain the same in each form through which it has passed.

CHAPTER TWO

THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED: THEATRE OF THE PEOPLE

Augusto Böal's book *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) outlines his belief in a new form of theatre based on a new poetics. It recognizes, in contradiction to the beliefs of Aristotle, that drama and politics are inextricably intertwined. Böal's description of this new theatre begins with an analysis of the poetics which have preceded him.

In section one, "Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy", Böal gives a brief history of the Greek philosophers and their schools of thought, in a search for accurate definitions of the terms used by Aristotle in his *Poetics* as they relate to drama.

Aristotle declares the independence of poetry (lyric, epic and dramatic) in relation to politics. What I propose to do in this work is to show that, in spite of that, Aristotle constructs the first, extremely powerful poetic-political system for intimidation of the spectator, for the elimination of the 'bad' or illegal tendencies of the audience. (Boal xiv)

For Aristotle, tragedy must create a catharsis in the spectator. That is, the spectator must be purged of the motivations for anti-social actions he or she shares with the protagonist. This shared *hamartia* (tragic flaw) is pointed out to the audience as the cause of the protagonist's eventual downfall. Through each spectator's empathetic connection with the protagonist, based on his or her own similar flaws, he or she is discouraged, by fear of similar repercussions, from taking the same course of action as the protagonist. In Böal's analysis of Greek tragedy, this catharsis happens as a result of four stages within a play conforming to Aristotle's poetics.

First Stage: Stimulation of the *hamartia*; the character follows an ascending path toward happiness, accompanied empathetically by the spectator. Then

comes a moment of reversal: the character, with the spectator, starts to move from happiness toward misfortune; fall of the hero. (Boal 37)

In this stage, as the play moves forward the audience follows the protagonist's rise to or initial state of prominence as a citizen of the society. While the audience gains an awareness of the character's flaw, the character either remains unaware of it or considers it a desirable, useful attribute. At this point the audience may also consider it a desirable trait. It would not, however, take many attendances before a spectator could recognize the plot line of the average tragedy; an audience member would have been able to see very quickly what would cause a character's downfall. 'Spot the flaw' was probably a popular Greek theatre pastime. The knowledge of style, however, does not render the format useless, since it is a similar method to the one used by the average sit-com presently on television.

Second Stage: The character recognizes his error-*anagnorsis*. Through the empathic relationship--*dianoia-reason*, the spectator recognizes his own error, his own hamartia, his own anticonstitutional flaw. (Boal 37)

The spectator, who is empathetically connected with the protagonist, discovers that the same attribute that made the prominence of the protagonist possible, and is possibly shared with the spectator, is also what will lead to his or her downfall.

Third Stage: *Catastrophe*; the character suffers the consequences of his error, in a violent form, with his own death or with the death of loved ones. (Boal 37)

At this point in the drama, the spectators realize what their own fate may be if they do not heed the warning exemplified by the fate of the protagonist. The spectator, then, hopes for ways to avoid this same outcome in his or her own life.

Catharsis: The spectator, terrified by the spectacle of the catastrophe, is purified of his *hamartia*. (Boal 37)

Böäl's conclusion at this point is that while Aristotle may state that theatre and politics are separate, his own poetics dictate that drama be essentially coercive in favour of behaviour that will perpetuate the status-quo. That is, of course, the essence of mainstream politics: not only to preserve the state, but to preserve it in a form that benefits those who presently control it. It is useful to remember that theatre in Greece, in the time of Aristotle, was a state-sponsored event held during the Festival of Dionysus. As Böäl further concludes, "[T]o engage in revolutionary action...we will have to seek another poetics!" (Boal 47).

Section Two of Böäl's book, "Machiavelli and the Poetics of *Virtù*" begins his second argument. *Virtù* is variously translated as 'prowess' or 'ability' as the antithesis of *fortuna* meaning 'influences from without' or 'fortune'. The next revolution in the poetics of theatre comes at the end of the medieval period with the wresting of the theatre from under the control of the church and the feudal lords by the rising bourgeois.

The typical feudal characters were not human beings, but rather abstractions of moral, religious values; they did not exist in the real, concrete world.... They were not character-subjects of the dramatic action, but simply objects acting as spokesmen for the values they symbolized... and acted according to the perspective of the nobility and the clergy who patronized that art. (Boal 56)

It is "Machiavelli [who] initiates the poetics of *virtù*" (Boal 58). Böäl puts forth the idea that the rising bourgeoisie, who abhorred tradition and the positions given by birthright, had only the tools at hand to invent guidelines for their behaviour. This was their *virtù*; and added to *virtù* was *praxis*, thinking and experimenting as you go along. For Böäl this is the basis of Shakespeare's plays. His plays show characters whose passions get the better of them "at least until the fifth act where he relents" (Boal 84). They are, however, the most human characters up to that time and display the concept of *virtù* in the bourgeois sense of

the word. They are no longer limited to the traditional actions of a person of their station in life. Shakespeare's characters either break mores and conventions, or are temporarily removed from their society, to clarify the pursuit of their own goals.

The third section of *Theatre of the Oppressed* deals with Brecht. Böal begins with a brief review of Piscator's work and concludes that his use of mixed media, "motion pictures, slides, graphics," gave "absolute freedom of form" which "broke the conventional *empathic* tie and produced an effect of *distance*" (Boal 84). Piscator's belief was that if drama is too concerned with form it cannot reflect the world as it is, and that the audience must think while in the theatre.

Brecht's characters also deviate from accepted theatrical practice: the subject of the action. They were objects of social forces predominantly beyond their control. "For Brecht 'human nature' does not exist and therefore nobody is what he is 'just because'" (Boal 96). Marxist and materialist influences on Brecht can be seen in his characters who, while they could make different choices than they do, are inhibited by their society, or more accurately their position in that society. Böal, like many others, mentions that the term "epic theatre" is a misnomer and suggests that it should have been named "Marxist poetics" (Boal 93). Much has been said about Brecht's theatre being a reasoning theatre not an emotional or empathetic theatre; however, Böal feels that this is inaccurate. Brecht has at no time said the theatre cannot be emotional; but it should not be an "emotional orgy". It should be emotion of knowledge not of ignorance. "What Brecht does not want is that the spectators continue to leave their brains with their hats upon entering the theatre, as do bourgeois spectators" (104). If theatre ends in a catharsis which creates a satiated audience that audience is leaving

their 'station' in tact. If theatre leaves an audience with a purpose or goal of helping to change society they are continuing work on their "locale".

"Poetics of the Oppressed", the fourth section of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, outlines Böal's new form of theatre. "In the beginning the theatre was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast" (Boal 120). The Theatre of the Oppressed resulted from the inclusion of the language of theatre as part of a literacy campaign, based on Paulo Freire's methods of popular education, begun in 1973 in Peru. The process is a relatively simple group of precepts which closely follow the basic training of actors, brought to the people. The difference is that these are people who have a story and are learning an effective way of analyzing and telling it. Not the only way, but one that can put the carnival back into the theatre.

First stage: *Knowing the body*: a series of exercises by which one gets to know one's body, its limitations and possibilities, its social distortions and possibilities of rehabilitation. (Boal 126)

Through a series of exercise and games designed to help people become aware of the habits they have unconsciously assumed in the use of their bodies, voices and minds people can become aware of what previously they did not notice about themselves and their behaviour. There is also work on group dynamics, consensus decision making and trusting each other, as people can be at times during the process in vulnerable emotional states.

Second stage: *Making the body expressive*: a series of games by which one begins to express one's self through the body, abandoning other, more common and habitual forms of expression. (Boal 126)

In the second stage of the process, words are discouraged, 'show me' would best describe this aspect of the process. While in everyday life we rely on words for most of our

communication, in theatre it is the image that is most important. Any theatrical form uses the image created by one or more people as the basic building block of its language. With this in mind the vocabulary of the body and the relation to others must be expanded. If one was to use only the everyday body language it would be significantly less expressive, especially in the talking head world of North America.

Stage three: *Theatre as language*: one begins to practice theatre as a language that is living and *present*, not as a finished product displaying images of the past. (126)

Böal's poetics do not permit sitting in a theatre as a spectator. He has incorporated the "spect-actor" into his theatre. For the theatre of the oppressed, the production is not finished outside the audience's view and then brought before them; it is brought before them so that they may manipulate it to their liking. This can be done in several ways.

Simultaneous dramaturgy: The play being presented is a rudimentary beginning with roles assigned to the actors, but the nature of their interactions are only loosely defined. The audience will dictate how characters will affect the action of the play. The same scene may be run many times until all the options that an audience can think of have been seen and discussed.

Image theatre; In this method the audience without the use of words, will shape the actors like clay and arrange the actors relative to each other on the stage. They may create an image to begin a scene and an image to end a scene and ask the actors to find a way to bring the two images together; to tell the story that has only a beginning and an end, but as yet no middle.

Forum theatre: It is with this method of drama that the "spect-actor" is most in control of the action of the protagonist of the play. He or she is invited to replace the protagonist in the drama itself. The actor playing the protagonist is removed and the "spect-actor" comes onto the stage and assumes that role. He or she is free to try a solution to the dilemma faced by the character while all the other characters react to the protagonist within the guidelines of their characters.

For the spectator to be given control of the character and the action of the play is indeed a new form of theatre and it suggests a new purpose for the theatre. It no longer is for the enjoyment of those who wish society to remain the same, but for the rehearsal of action that will change it.

Unlike Boal and "Theatre of the Oppressed", the Mummers Troupe opted for a process of solidarity with the people in opposition to the top-down nature of the provincial arts programmes. Fiske refers to this top-down power as "imperialising". It's intent is to "extend the terrain over which it can exert its control...to people's most mundane thoughts and behaviours."(11)

CHAPTER THREE

THE MUMMERS TROUPE: THEATRE FOR THE PEOPLE

The Mummers Troupe began in much the same way as Boal's early efforts at what became Theatre of the Oppressed. In the early 1970s Chris Brookes and Lynn Lunde started a theatre as an antidote to what they saw as the cultural invasion of Newfoundland. The perception that people in Newfoundland were the laughing stock of Canada prompted a governmental reaction which included the building a series of large "cultural centres". These centres were predominantly conceived as a way of bringing the work of dead foreign playwrights, performed by touring companies (real art) to Newfoundland. This neither created a theatre environment, nor did it use Newfoundland culture as a basis. While this policy was couched in the goal of bringing culture to the province, it really amounted to theatrical and social imperialism: the top down selection of appropriate, art The fare of middle-class theatre at that time and, for the most part, still, was dictated by the elite and composed of European and American plays and musicals.

The Mummers Troupe, as it was eventually to be called, "developed a theatre intended primarily for community development and social animation" (Brookes xii). They were determined to become more aware of the traditional theatre of Newfoundland and to find in the people stories and traditions on which to build a theatre, not in a populist fashion, but in a fashion where the best of art could be created, with the people, and presented back to them. "Half the theatre of anything is how it comes at you before the show even starts; the clothes it wears and the expectations it arouses in an audience" (Brookes 7). With this in

mind, the Mummers Troupe started with a travelling *Punch And Judy Show*, two people in a van touring outports. This show, based on a concept that has survived for four hundred years has always been *ad hoc*; it has always maintained its appeal for people in the working class and those with an anti-establishment interests. Even though this show is imported it truly is universal in its simple denouncement of the status quo and the social control enforced by an elite, from politicians to the devil itself. From the essence of this show the troupe created a *Punch and Joey Show*, thus creating theatre from the people's frustrations with their own government and society.

Wanting to create "A theatre that would engage in constructive dialogue with a people I knew intimately" (Brookes 10), the Troupe went in search of the only indigenous theatre tradition, "The Mummers Play," though as Brookes says, no one called it that. "To those who practised the custom, it was never 'theatre', 'art' or a 'play'. In some communities it was referred to as 'the rhymes', but in most outports it was just done" (Brookes 15). The Troupe's research indicated this ritual may have come from the solstice festivals of Europe and was performed in the hope of bringing the sun back into the sky. Today it is as valid for different reasons. It represents people controlling their environment; "politically speaking, its premise lies in the collective belief that reality is transformable" (Brookes 17).

For the twelve days, from St. Stephen's Day to Epiphany, mummers represented 'the law' of social inversion. They had the power to commit breaches of 'normal' social decorum, and to wreak retribution upon persons who had incurred the animosity of the community during the preceding year. (Brookes 23)

This was the tradition of the mummers play and *mumming*. It was also important to Brookes to work as a collective and create theatre that was more contemporary but still of,

by or for the people. The Troupe's approaches varied from one to project to the next because of constraints imposed by personnel, the nature of each project, and funding. Theatre funding is generally minimal, but for politically motivated theatre it is next to nil. Governments are not interested in funding revolt or criticism within their own borders.

The first project was recreating the Mummers Play in its traditional form and method of presentation. Historically this play had been performed by people in each community; for the purposes of the troupe it would be done by actors, "or as near as they could find" (Brookes 47). Brookes points out that the problem in trying to recreate this art form from literary sources was that "the mummers was essentially a performance tradition, not a literary one..." (Brookes 48). The Troupe had to recreate the process of mummering from written accounts of the play and living sources. "In 1972 there were less than two dozen Newfoundlanders still living who had actually seen the Mummers Play in performance" (Brookes 47). As knowledge of the characters grew, however, they were recognized as really having their own personality, as being "slapstick archetypal characters, sacred and profane at the same time. It was like watching Jesus tell dirty jokes" (Brookes 48). The play when completed was performed in homes, taverns, restaurants, fishing boats and buses around St. John's for the twelve days of Christmas. This was theatre for the people, theatre that came knocking on your door. It was a connection to the people that the company maintained throughout its work: "Thereafter we went mummering every Christmas until the company died in 1982" (Brookes 54).

"So we began improvising dramatic material directly from research. This was a method we were to refine over the next decade" (Brookes 66). The first show was

Newfoundland Night, a show about the history of the fishing industry from the point of view of the fishers. Sets were minimal and the performance moved among the audience. After the initial performances in St. John's, the company, with a new cast, began to tour outports. They were received with story-telling and invitations into peoples homes. The show itself was one to incite and invite and ended with an opportunity for the audience to discuss what it had seen and how it related to their lives.

This format gave the audience the opportunity to discuss the play and the subject and also gave the Mummers the opportunity to add to the play and make it better reflect the society. People may not have had control of the entire play but they had input into a story about their own lives which became part of the next performance. The play spoke and listened: another tradition of Newfoundland. The Troupe toured throughout the outports and eventually went to Gros Morne, the site of a proposed national park. In the midst of the tour they found five communities struggling to stay alive.

To create the play *Gros Mourn* they lived and talked with the people. They tape recorded interviews with children and adult residents and talked with Gros Morne park officials and politicians. They created a play with sets and props culled from local scrap heaps with help from local children. Brookes noted that as the collective process went on: "We can only re-express the questions--the people themselves must find their answers" (Brookes 82). The Troupe found in the people, however, a wealth of story and expression, "The whole myth of Art is autocratic nonsense. Everyone, not merely the artist, speaks poetry, breaths music" (Brookes 86). After the performance the towns-people decided to hold a meeting in the morning to discuss what was to be done at the signing ceremony that day. At the meeting

it was decided to protest the signing. At the protest the morning of the signing Brookes realized: "As they talk, I notice a curious phenomenon: our show has crystallised a terminology for many of the demonstrators. They use metaphors drawn from the play's imagery as they present their case. The play has clarified the Salley's Cove reality: it has given people a 'handle' on it" (Brookes 89). The show went on to St. John's and later to areas in the Maritime provinces where other parks were planned. The eventual outcome, after several protests was a revision of the National Parks policy.

In 1974 while the government was busy celebrating twenty-five years of confederation, the Mummers Troupe was examining oppression in the mining town of Buchans. For this performance the actors were predominantly from the mainland, so the idea of personifying the miners of Buchans was not going to be possible. "By not pretending to become the people of Buchans, but merely 'indicating' the audience to themselves, the company committed itself to a style which reveals the idea of theatre itself while it plays. Any artifice is broken" (Brookes 115). The troupe decided to create a people's history. Interviews were taped but if the play deviated from the accurate portrayal of the people's lives then it would be made clear these were the actors terms not the people's. The Troupe's method was, first, participating in the lifestyle of the community and then arranging what they learned through "show and tell": acting out the stories of the days experience, visual story telling. Local songs, folklore such as ghost stories from the mines and a miner's speech, never given, for the occasion of receiving the twenty-five year gold watch. In the collective creation of the play, the problem of dramatic interest verses "co-opting" real stories arose. "It was essential not to take Buchaneer's lives away from them, give them mainland

accents, graceful movements, and more dramatic actions" (Brookes120). It was eventually decided that the scenes that were not the people's stories would be set off by the staging "in an obviously different presentational style, using a kind of agit-prop shorthand".

This show also toured the outports and the union halls. Throughout the history of the Mummers Troupe, the members never lost sight of the people whose stories these were. Using the peoples own stories and the vernacular in all aspects of their productions were the hallmark of their plays. The use of image in both creating and performing, and the desire to use as many resources from Newfoundland as well as working as a collective are features which establish this approach as radically distinct from theatre created in the high culture model.

Sistren, discussed in the next chapter, also work as a collective to analyse and present a view of their own society. Sistren, however, is composed of working class women who are also the subject of their work. Part of their process was their own personal development which they pass on as part of their work with other groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

SISTREN: THEATRE BY THE PEOPLE

The Sistren collective is a group of 10 working class, Jamaican women who use popular theatre both to create plays and as a tool in their work with groups who seek social change. The group began in a manner that should be considered as integral to its methods and success. Popular theatre is a method of conscientization that a facilitator may be more interested in using than are the participants: a solution in search of a problem. This is not the case for Sistren.

In 1977 the Jamaican government of Michael Manley created the Impact Programme. It was designed to employ predominantly women as street cleaners to alleviate the problem of lack of non-domestic jobs. The unemployment rate for women was 44% (Lambert 245). The hope was also that more money would end up in the working class household, not the bars and brothels. Honor Ford-Smith, the facilitator of Sistren, later came to realize, the Impact Programme had unplanned effects too. "What I realized... was that in doing this, consciously or unconsciously, the PNP [People's National Party] government had made a space within which women could begin to organize around their own concerns" (Ford-Smith 122). The writings of Honor Ford-Smith provide a lesson for facilitators who wish not to impose methods on a group, but, as much as possible, let groups direct their own actions.

In 1977 I was invited to direct a play for a Workers' Week concert. Thirteen women wanted to explore their situation as women further and they wanted to do it in a way they would enjoy. I asked them what they wanted to do a play about? They said, 'We want to do plays about how we suffer as women. We want to do plays about how men treat us bad.' (Ford-Smith a, 10)

The fact that Sistren began in this way precluded the tendency of some projects to become a "sloganeering propaganda exercise" (Lambert 242). The group progressed as *they* saw fit as Ford-Smith points out. "[W]e worked without written material until an interest in the written material evolved and until we could use the scripts we had... In those first workshops I did a lot of listening to stories. I stopped trying to make things fit into improvisation methods that I had learned and started listening to stories" (Ford-Smith 124).

The material was drawn from the life stories of the women from both inside and outside the group as well as the extensive oral history of the lives of women on the island.

After the show for the Workers' Week concert, the women wished to continue using popular theatre. They were able to begin working out of the Jamaican Theatre school. "These advances in social education, however, must be viewed in the political climate of a supportive democratic socialist government in Jamaica...."(Lambert 247). This amount of government support is rare.

The work of Sistren became two-fold: first, to develop as individuals, albeit in a group environment, and second, to share their methods with interested people and their discoveries of themselves and their society with everyone. "Sistren defined itself as a collective which used (a) drama as a means to explore and analyse the events and forces that shape its members' lives and (b) theatre and workshops as a means to share a this experience with other groups" (Ford-Smith 124). Sistren relied on "some of the ideas of Böal, as a means of conscientization to explore the mechanisms that oppress both women and other powerless sections in society" (Lambert 244).

The process for Sistren, although it continues to evolve with its members, can be broken down into two stages. The processes within these two stages are similar, but the earlier stage involved training for the group while the later is concerned with the work done by Sistren in its public productions and with groups.

The first step in the earlier stage was training the participants to be capable of fulfilling the vocal and physical demands of drama. This process can be long and difficult because the body learns to inhibit its own abilities of expression through the habitual actions and thoughts of the our daily routine. "The work in the physical skill begins with and through the body of the woman herself--it is the instrument she works with--not something introduced from outside" (Ford-Smith 126). These skill building exercises are not an end in themselves, they represent the beginning of the process and are done in such a way as to generate material on which to base further stages of the work.

It is also necessary in this first step to create a space, both physical and mental in which the group will feel at ease and free from the judgement of others. This step in the later stage of Sistren's development also includes understanding the community with whom they are working. Not only are the participants in the workshop sources of information, but external resources are also useful. This may include people and research from outside the group that help clarify problems or lead toward solutions. "The researcher is not coming in to tell the group what to do, she is coming in to offer her skills and to help answer certain questions" (Ford-Smith 127). At no time does the group relinquish control of the explorations. This first step is consistent with groups doing any type of theatre and is, in fact, the process of learning the language of theatre. Like learning a language it can be enjoyable and

spontaneous or mechanical and tedious. In popular theatre it must be the former as there is regularly little or no remuneration except for a sense of accomplishment and the enjoyment of the process and the possibility of helping to change society.

Ford-Smith refers to the Second step as "evoking material". Testimony, drawing or role playing are used as exercises in which people present ideas to others in the group. "Out of these exercises certain themes will begin to emerge. The next step involves pulling out a specific theme or themes around which to continue the work" (Ford-Smith 126). For Sistren, the use of these testimonies is particularly effective because of the "Afro-Jamaican tradition of testimony". "'Personal testimony' is based on the familiar cultural form of testimonies of the Lord, or on the 'labrish', a kind of wise gossip among women" (Lambert 245). Sistren, or groups with whom they are working, use testimonies as the basis of analysing the problems faced by members. "It is because Sistren draws upon the Afro-Jamaican tradition of testimony (which is an art-form but which is also real, that is, it is performed but is not fiction) that the intellectual and the emotional impact is so strong" (Ford-Smith 125). It is not by chance that using tradition and folk forms creates in the group or audience a connection to the process. It is perilous to any group and their goal to believe that universal methodology can have a significant effect on participants or the audience. To tell people they control their own lives by using a method imposed on them is to falsify the message with the medium: it would be similar to conducting a literacy campaign through television. Selecting similar experience from the group to use in the process of evaluating society and the individual's place within that society is a way of validating people and their experience.

The third step, "moulding raw material", is composed of selecting and analysing the themes presented in the preceding step. Image making and discussion of the stories brought forward by the individuals lead to improvisations which are written into scenes, complete plays or methods on which to base workshops.

Step Four of the process is "presentation". It can be the production of a play for a specific group or for the general public, or a workshop with another group to help them analyse their problems or create a play for them to present as the first stage of their action in solving their problem. While drama is more empowering for actors and workshop participants than for any audience, it is necessary to bring the product outside the group who created it. This serves the purpose of showing the wider society the abilities of the creators, and a different view of the world. Sistren stages productions in many working class venues as well as the local commercial theatre, "because it seemed to us important that working-class women should have access to the most authoritative cultural institutions in the country, that they would make their claims visible and bring their voices to the public" (Ford-Smith 124). "One of the most important things about performances is that they can be an act of solidarity with a particular issue or struggle" (Ford-Smith 128).

Methods and techniques are not very important. It is where they take you that matters. What becomes of the work is determined by the content and the consciousness one brings to the theme. Work of this kind can perpetuate oppressive structures as well as it can help to change them. The form is only important in so far as it structures and analyses the content and in so far as it leads to new understandings, new knowledge, and new collective action. (Ford-Smith 128)

Step five is recording the methods, process and results. "The recorded material can be reused and passed on. A great deal of unrecorded improvisational work has gone on in

Jamaica, and one of the sad results of this is that we have no access to material which has been done before" (Ford-Smith 127). This is a constant problem in the medium of popular theatre. Because the people doing the work are also the people responsible for recording it, this is often left for later or never done for lack of time, money or people.

Sistren for two reasons found it imperative to record their work: not only were they interested in leaving a record, which initially they were lax about, but, since many of the group were illiterate when they began, empowerment over the written word, in their own language of Creole and English, was a group goal.

"These techniques are not necessarily the same that Sistren would use if they were working on their own or with another director... They cannot be randomly applied because they are aimed at bringing about a certain process and a certain end" (Ford-Smith 122). If people are to have more control over their lives and societies, to create a "locale", the method by which they take that control cannot be imposed on them by well-meaning facilitators and social activists. It is essential that the group be democratically created and run and must continue to evaluate itself with each member having the same amount of control over the work of the group and the methods used. "By viewing the personal as the political, Sistren aims to break down barriers, ...and through short-term problem solving, provide a basis for long-term problem solving" (Lambert 246).

Having looked at various popular theatre methods facilitators and people have chosen, the next chapter outlines underlying principles to create appropriate methods for working with people trying to take further control of their " locale".

CHAPTER FIVE

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

The preceding chapters have been an examination of the history, theory and practice of popular theatre inspired by the work of Meyerhold, Piscator and Brecht. Although their work eventually became styles within mainstream theatre, their additions of new media and theories about presentation and purpose not only revolutionized the mainstream theatre but spawned entirely new ones.

Avant-garde theatre, like many other art forms, has often been adopted and de-clawed by the elite. The goal of popular theatre is to place theatre at the centre of people's lives and people's lives at the centre of theatre.

The central issue of this thesis is a search for the most useful aspects of popular theatre. It is not the search for universal techniques or methods, but the principles which underlie them. The work of many people especially Paulo Freire (1970), (1973) and, within theatre, Augusto Böal has led to a new belief that people need the opportunity to educate themselves and tell the stories that have been suppressed under the dominant classes. The workers' movements of the 1920s showed that workers could offer more than strong backs to society and that art, especially theatre, could come from these people.

In Canada, the Mummer's Troupe developed a style that was for and from the people to whom it was predominantly addressed. The Troupe created and performed as an act of solidarity with those Newfoundlanders whose voices are regularly ignored or ridiculed by the people who control that society.

In Jamaica, Sistren has created a theatre for and by the people with whom they continue to work. Not only are they working with people, but Sistren is comprised of working class women whose own development has been part of their process.

If popular theatre is going to continue to be a useful tool it must carry on the way it began: attempting to find unique solutions to unique problems. To be effective, I posit popular theatre needs to be rooted in three principles: (1) the goals must be set by the people; (2) the process of popular theatre must be adjusted to fit the indigenous concerns and ways of people; and (3) the process must be conducted by them in a democratic manner.

With respect to the foremost theorist of popular theatre, Böal, these principles present a problem. During the *Rainbow Circle Workshop* held on the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reservation, on Manitoulin Island, Ontario during August of 1992, I had the opportunity to work with Augusto Böal, many Canadian popular theatre practitioners, and ten participants from the First Nation. The workshop was to have three goals: (1) a project with the native participants; (2) an exchange of methods among the Canadian practitioners; and (3) a workshop of Böal's techniques on "Theatre of the Oppressed" and "Rainbow of Desires".

It quickly became clear that Böal himself was more interested in showing that Theatre of the Oppressed worked than he was in achieving the goals of the workshop. During the two-week workshop one third of the participants withdrew, including eight of the ten native participants. The reasons for these withdrawals, discussed only outside the workshop, included the lack of democratic decision-making leading to a complete breakdown of the proposed agenda, lack of indigenous methods in the process, and a lack of discussion of concerns about the practice of popular theatre in general. The shrinking group and the

problems were not addressed by Böal. Outside the workshop discussions ranged from ethics to whether or not Theatre of the Oppressed was in fact popular theatre or something entirely different.

In discussions of popular theatre the participants of the “Rainbow Workshop” related stories of their own experience with these kinds of problems in all popular theatre projects. These problems, if not constantly addressed and dealt with democratically by the group as they arise, lead to either the above mentioned kind of problems or projects controlled by the facilitator. The consensus among the participants was that fostering people's control over their own lives is one of the central elements of popular theatre. The “Rainbow Workshop” violated all three of the basic tenets that are necessary to popular theatre as outlined in this thesis. It was declared a rousing failure, except that it demonstrated what can happen when universally applied systems get in the way of the task at hand.

Another concern raised by the workshop was that while the process of popular theatre is essentially one of group solutions to systemic problems, one of the more useful performance techniques, Forum Theatre, is based on individual action. When a person stops the action on stage they are forced to act alone within the play to solve the problem. Several solutions were put forth such as letting groups discuss the problem and then letting one of the group attempt that solution. It was also suggested that the need exists for a feminist analysis of Theatre of the Oppressed. In general, the need for continued evaluation of Theatre of the Oppressed was acknowledged by everyone but Böal.

Böal's methods may be subject to his own critique of Aristotle's tragedy and may have become coercive like those they were meant to oppose. Böal's theories, however, still

provide a basis from which to work if they are used or discarded in a judicious manner to ensure that the process is controlled by the participants. Böal, however, is not fond of having his methods picked and chosen from; he perceives them as a complete and unified whole.

When history moved more slowly than lifetimes theatre was used by people to tell their stories both past and present. These stories and the methods of telling them were not imposed on them from outside. Outside influences, when they appeared were incorporated into the stories; but, the stories were still from the people. It may be that popular theatre is returning us to that beginning. Both Sistren and the Mummery Troupe created effective, though different, methods to use in their respective work. This is not to say that they have found the only or best solutions, simply solutions that let them accomplish the goals that they have set for themselves.

The Mummer's Troupe began with the sincere desire of its founders to act for and in solidarity with the rural people of Newfoundland. They wanted to revive what they believed was their society's only indigenous theatrical tradition and bring the art of working class people to the cultural centres of the province instead of letting it vanish under the growing cultural imperialism.

While their work is an excellent example of how theatre can act on behalf of others it contains little development for anyone but the troupe itself as social activists and actors. Brookes himself mentions that the problems addressed by the troupe within a specific community could not be followed up by the troupe if they were to continue creating theatre and not become a group wholly devoted to community development. Because of their

process people were included in the creation of the plays, but not the re-creation of themselves.

Had the troupe opted for a process that included the people in the way that Sistren does, then the possibility exists that many groups would have been created in rural communities and continued to deal with the problems of those communities. This is not to say that the Mummings Troupe was a failure but to point out that its goal was more to tell people's stories than to help people tell their own. The Mummings Troupe became adept at helping to clarify problems and presenting those problems to a wider audience; but because of its method the Troupe did not include the people as more than a resource in its process. The goals were set by the Troupe and the product was presented in such a way as to be accepted by the groups with whom they were working. While being sensitive to the people it is not a democratic process and one that does not allow people to reclaim control over their lives.

In contrast, Sistren is a collective which began with a central principle that members would be the people themselves. This was due to two facts: (1) the people adopted the method, they simply needed someone to help them with the language of theatre; and (2) Honor Ford-Smith realized the virtue of not imposing a method on them, preferring to let methods develop with the group.

Ideally, popular theatre would be a spontaneous result of the people looking for a way to analyse and present possible solutions to their own problems. The reality is more often that of a solution in search of a problem. The danger for development workers is always imposing a solution on people who are not looking for that solution. To start a literacy campaign with people who do not see a need to be literate is a misreading of the starting point in development, even though someone may believe all people need to be literate.

Development must always begin with the people and be directed by their needs. Being told what they need is part of the existing problem.

Sistren began with the desires of the working class women to tell their stories and have more control over their lives. It also began under a sympathetic government which gave it access to resources that most similar groups do without. Although the group did not always run smoothly it solved its problems by becoming more democratic not less; when people feel that they are being heard they are more likely to listen. The development of the group as a whole and its members included literacy in English as well as Creole, and the re-creation of working class women into people who could analyse problems present within their society at a time when women were severely oppressed.

From the study of these groups a theory begins to emerge. Any popular theatre project is based on three aspects: 1) the environment; 2) the facilitator's responsibilities; and 3) the process of the workshop itself (see Table I p36). The ideal environment for popular theatre has three elements. Firstly, the people must determine the problems that require solutions. Secondly, the people looking for solutions must believe popular theatre can be of use to them; if this method is chosen for them then goals and methods are not being chosen by the people. Thirdly, the group needs to find a facilitator who is familiar with the methods of popular theatre and is willing to work with them in a democratic way.

As a facilitator one needs be aware of his or her responsibilities. The first is that the participants must be encouraged to work as a group. At the base of all actions must be the constant belief that all games, exercises and techniques must be group oriented. People still

Table I:

Ideal Environment and Guidelines for Popular Theatre
<p>Environment</p> <p>Participants must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Determine the problem to be solved.2) Believe Popular Theatre can help solve the problem.3) Find a facilitator with whom they can work.
<p>Facilitator's Responsibilities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Help to create or reinforce a feeling of a group.2) Explain the purpose of all activities that further personal development, group dynamics or the goals of the group.3) Work to become obsolete.
<p>The Process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Body awareness.2) Image creation and development.3) Image refinement and creation of presentation method.4) Presentation.5) Review of the process and presentation.6) Recording of the process and presentation

need to act alone within the group, but the nature of this kind of work requires a secure environment where people can speak and act without fear of ridicule or censure. The work need not be limited to speaking; the use of images, music, dance are all to be encouraged. These methods of telling stories are often more effective than speech. What they lack in specificity they more than make up for in understanding and recognition among the other members of the group or future audience.

Another responsibility is that the process must be explained. In learning the language of theatre the body becomes the tool of expression. Through exercises and games, participants learn to use their body and voice its full potential. This work is very often of a non-rational nature but the goal of each game or exercise needs to be explained. Many facilitators believe this jeopardizes the learning of these non-rational aspects of theatre but in the rational world in which we live, to leave these unexplained creates more problems than it solves and results in people being led, not leading themselves. In all aspects of the work the facilitator should be working to create his or her own obsolescence.

The process itself has six steps. The first is learning the language of theatre and freeing the body from habits that have been created over a lifetime. Using exercises and games, a gradual building of awareness of the body and unnecessary habits of posture and vocal production can be recognized and changed. Many techniques of using the body to tell stories through images that will be used in the next stage are presented in this stage.

In the second step, the images and stories are used to create themes which can be worked on in more depth. Images are presented and then altered by observers or the people within the image and the ideas expressed by the images are analysed. Discussions of how

the people in the image relate to each other, power, control, violence, tenderness can all be elicited by these images and related to the lives of the group members.

Step three is the refinement of both the images and the continuation of the previous steps including group dynamics and problem-solving. The images created are improved and then honed into a theatrical statement: an image with anything superfluous removed. That includes movements, words, anything that does not add something to the scene. These scenes can then be arranged into a whole and the process of refinement continues on a larger scale.

The fourth step is that of presenting the work. Methods of presentation such as simultaneous dramaturgy, *forum theatre* (Böal, 1979) or other methods including workshops with other groups are considered. The method of presentation must be a consideration in the third step as well because the intention for the work determines what will be developed and how. These considerations need to include the venue for the presentation too. Will it be for an audience of peers or for the mainstream theatre, a public performance, part of a demonstration or an attempt to incite one? Depending on the decisions some choice of purpose and venue may exist, but the success of a presentation often depends on the venue and choosing the right audience.

The fifth step is the review of the process and presentation. It is important for the group to understand the reasons either for success or failure of the process or presentation. In this way the group comes to understand--not just participate in--action for social change. To ignore this step is to be left with mere social activism; when the need is for people to be involved in praxis. Review is necessary throughout the process when either problems or

successes are encountered, but a balance between discussing everything and still being able to act must be maintained.

Step Six is the recording of the process. A great deal of work has been done using popular theatre but there is very little of it written down for people to use as a resource. This is becoming less true with video technology and with cheaper methods of recording the material the body of information is growing. It is important that all groups add their experiences in the hope that someday popular theatre will not be as invisible a tool as it is presently.

Theatre has been widely perceived as being intentionally apolitical; at least mainstream critics and dramatists maintain that the more political it becomes, the less artistic it becomes. That is, political theatre is not considered real art and is sanctioned as radical, disruptive or seditious by defenders of the status-quo.

Popular theatre can help the understanding of people who have been silenced by cultural imperialism or other forms of oppression. Popular theatre has not had the luxury of having a high profile either as an art, or a tool in the struggle for development, it therefore has not been subjected to as much constructive criticism as it needs in order to develop to its full potential. As we begin to redefine the role and methods of development in the world, especially who controls it and to what end, popular theatre will be an excellent medium for evaluating these problems which silence the oppressed.

Nevertheless, if popular theatre is to be a useful tool it must be continually examined to see that it does not embody the very problem for which it can be part of the solution. While it is often said that humans are resistant to change, it may be more accurate that it is

the lack of control over that change that creates our resistance: the difference between a change of “locale” as opposed to a change of “station”.

The next chapter describes the attempt to use the principles discussed already to create a popular theatre project.

CHAPTER SIX

LANDMARK EAST POPULAR THEATRE PROJECT: METHODS

This chapter discusses the methods of the popular theatre project which forms the primary focus of this thesis. It occurred during the winter of the 1993/1994 school year. The participants were twelve adolescents who all attended the same school in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Due to the fact that I was both a facilitator and a student trying to observe and critique a method for conducting such a popular theatre project, the methods for this thesis project needs to be considered in two ways: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsically this is a popular theatre experience with a facilitator and participants. The facilitator helps the participants, through a series of techniques and exercises, analyse and then present, in some way, both the analysis and a discussion of a solution. All of this should be accomplished in such a way as to make the facilitator obsolete, or at least reduced to a resource available to the participants on their terms.

Extrinsically it is a study of how a facilitator accomplishes these goals. In this respect this study is an action research project with what may be considered a 'facilitant observer': a participant observer with a declared interventionist intent. Unlike the tradition of participant observer, the goal of the 'facilitant observer' is to intervene in a group in accordance with the group's wishes.

In any observation of a social group participating in an activity designed to foster conscientization the dual methodologies of the action within the group and those used by the observer to critique the action are present. In this study, however, the divisions between the

intrinsic and extrinsic are less discrete due to the fact that one person is fulfilling both the role of facilitator and critical observer of the study. The difference between this project and a thesis is that it is both. It is a description and critique of a popular theatre facilitator both gaining experience in action and refining ideas: praxis. As such it can be a resource or inspiration for further action by this facilitator or others. It also becomes, as a thesis, an academic product, thereby possibly furthering the legitimacy of popular theatre as well as a describing how a particular social scientist collects data on an aspect of his own society.

In November of 1993 I began looking for an appropriate project: a group of people who believed they needed popular theatre as a medium. As one might imagine there are not a great number of groups seeking popular theatre as a method of expression since awareness of the process is still quite low. I did, however, discover that Landmark East, a private school for adolescents with learning disabilities, usually created some kind of theatrical production each year, but would not that year (1993/94). I approached the head of Landmark East School who agreed to let me conduct a study/project and suggested I make a proposal to the students themselves, which I did one evening after supper at the school. The proposal was a demonstration of some of the techniques of popular theatre and an explanation of the process including the fact that participants themselves would set the goals. Students volunteered to include this project as one of their elective activities and the school selected twelve students, from the volunteers, to participate.

While arranging this I met Fred Campbell who had experience in similar projects with *Youth for Social Justice* as a development worker in Newfoundland, and had used video cameras as part of the process. This solved two problems: one, it provided a co-facilitator

for the project which was desirable because of my lack of experience and, two, it enabled the recording of the process to become part of the process. This was an ideal development that proved to be very popular with the participants and it became a central focus of the project.

In having to “take what comes along” as the thesis project several undesirable or unexpected constraints were placed on the project.

Firstly, the project was a solution in search of a problem. This was not a group of people who had decided to use popular theatre as a medium with which to create and send a message. This was me in search of a thesis project. The students were, however, interested to discover what it entailed.

Secondly, the fact that I would be working with adolescents was unexpected. Furthermore, they were not an autonomous group: as adolescent students, limitations were placed on both them and me and consequently onto the project. However, I felt that since popular theatre was a visually based medium it may be of great benefit to people who had difficulty with words, written or spoken.

Thirdly, I was told that some students who volunteered were not permitted to participate based on the staff’s appraisal of whether or not each would be disruptive or benefit from participating. While I was not entirely happy with this arrangement, these were the “rules of the game.” Whether or not this worked to the benefit or detriment of either those included or excluded cannot be known.

Fourthly, the school wanted two, then one, teacher as observer/chaperone included in the project. This proved interesting, helpful and awkward; for example, while the participants addressed the non-teachers by first name they continued to address their teacher as Mr.

H.. I was never quite sure how to address him and therefore which paradigm to reinforce. (The environment we were trying to create was one where terms of address did not include power dynamics.) He had useful insights into dealing with the participants if they were losing their focus and was at times treated by participants almost as one of them and at other times as very much an authority figure.

It was necessary to create a schedule that fit into the existing schedule at Landmark East School; this, however, is much the same in any popular theatre project because of the need for participants to continue with jobs, families and life. The project was designed to take twenty-four, ninety-minute sessions, to fit into the Landmark East schedule of two seven week cycles including holidays. Finding locations was difficult in the beginning and several rooms on the Acadia campus were used until the stage in University Hall became our permanent location. Having a regular space for such a project is beneficial due to the fact that participants may feel the need to explore each new space which can cause delays. It was decided not to use Landmark facilities for two reasons: one, they do not have a room large enough for many of the exercises; and two, separation between the school and the project was desirable in order to give the participants some semblance of privacy from the school in which to work.

During the first few evenings participants changed somewhat as students and teachers sorted out who could or wanted to attend. I was not a participant in these discussions and by the fourth night twelve participants, five girls and seven boys had volunteered and been permitted by the school to attend. There were absences for various reasons but these were few and sporadic.

Equipment for this project was initially a problem. The school would not let us use their video camera, citing the danger to the equipment, but cameras were eventually available from the audiovisual department of the University and Fred Campbell brought switching units and monitors with him. Setting up and taking down, as well as operating, the cameras, microphones and video switching unit became one of the tasks of the workshop at which most participants became competent and some quite proficient. It is interesting to note that twelve sometime raucous, enthusiastic young men and women broke no equipment whatsoever during the entire project, although the school would not let the students handle its video camera because of the danger of it being broken. It is also interesting to note that admonishments of “be careful, that’s a video camera,” came more from the participants themselves than from any of the adults.

As the project began, I created session plans (see Appendix A) which included a theme of purpose, warm-up activities, games and exercises (see Appendix B) to introduce participants to techniques for developing awareness of their bodies and the space around them and to a lesser extent, vocal production. The point of these exercises is to take that which is habitual and create awareness to make it optional. While much of actor training is not a rational process, experience in theatre school has made me believe that it is wise to point this out in a rational way; “just try this” is regularly met with resistance or confusion, so discussions and explanations about the process were included.

As the project progressed the exercises encompassed building trust in the participants themselves and each other as a group and as individuals. These exercises consist of controlled risk-taking where members of the group ensure the safety of each other. This com-

bined other co-operative activities help to foster a group dynamic within which it feels safe to experiment with the subsequent work.

The first session, like all sessions, began with the “opening circle” during which we introduced ourselves and discussed what we thought and hoped we could accomplish. At this point, the participants were not sure what the process entailed and therefore what might be accomplished. This progressed into games and exercises and a nascent understanding of the process if not the result. Some games and exercises were repeated throughout the project for several reasons. In some cases this repetition was due to absences, and it was felt that all participants should experience particular exercises. In other cases it was because of the popularity of an exercise. Consequently, some exercise had to be left out in what turned out to be a project shorter than need be.

As we progressed, the video system was introduced and became an increasingly central part of the process. As familiarization with it grew, exercises were based around it and the forms of communication that it creates such as interviews and talk shows. For example, part of the process at this stage was to have participants form sub-groups and to tell stories that were either of personal interest or about their own experiences. The sub-groups would select a story and then present it to the group as a whole in, initially, rough skit form. These stories became events that reporters could cover; they could interview the ‘victims’ or ‘perpetrators’ while other members of the group video taped them. These scenes could be refined if the group selected them to be included in the final taping. One of the techniques Fred Campbell brought from *Youth for Social Justice* workshops was “*Oprah*”, a talk show. Almost everyone knew the process because of the popularity of that television show and

others like it. Participants could interview their guests who were involved in the story. This, as it turned out, was the format of the final project with subject matter created in the above mentioned process. It was often the case that more than one “Oprah” was asking questions at a time with the result that there was little time to consider responses and the improvisational aspect of these exercises took over, sometimes generating very insightful discussions.

The project evolved from one with a theatrical presentation to one more based on the camera and television. It also involved more time being spent on the product than on techniques of theatre. This was anticipated, but longer sessions would have been beneficial because of the time needed to set up equipment and present and review skits. Had the sessions been longer more exercises could have been incorporated into the sessions without losing the opportunity to use the growing abilities of the participants.

Refining the techniques was also necessary as we went along to make sure that directions were clear and details of the exercises were at times changed to make them work more effectively or smoothly.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LANDMARK EAST PROJECT ANALYSIS

Did the project fulfill the requirements of “ideal popular theatre” as delineated earlier in the thesis? In some ways the project failed while in others it proved quite successful.

Firstly, let us analyse the environment for popular theatre. Did the participants determine the problem to be solved? If the problem was to find a way of doing some form of theatre in school that year then, yes, they chose it. I feel in this, however, that this was a solution, my need for a thesis project, in search of a problem. However, once they began this process they had the opportunity to discuss openly some of the situations which are for them problems.

As adolescents they were striving for freedom from various forms of authority which they believe are unfairly lorded over them. They were hoping to be given responsibility to run more aspects of their own lives and the opportunity to try their solutions to the problems they perceive. In many small ways, for a short period of time this project gave them the opportunity to control the learning situation in which they were involved, maybe for the first time in a constructive manner; students regularly try to exercise control of the agenda in a destructive manner. They had a great deal of influence on the agenda of each evening and the project in general as well as the responsibility for running several thousand dollars worth of video equipment. The image and scene work were based on stories of their experiences or interests.

One of the strategies Fred Campbell initiated was that the stories could be fictitious. By stating this, participants were given the freedom to dissociate from a story they wanted to relate to the group, thereby avoiding embarrassment or self-consciousness that adolescents can feel so intensely. While not a perfect solution, it proved to be a good temporary one which enabled participants to discuss their situation with other people. The importance of this cannot be overstated as shown by one participant: in an “Oprah” session as part of, “What goes Around Comes Around” (discussed below) someone asked if all mothers and fathers fight like that to which a *sotto voce* response came “No. No, **nope**. Mine did, but that’s [mumble...].”

It is, however, unlikely that these participants would have chosen popular theatre as a method because they knew nothing about it until having been through the process.

Did the participants find a facilitator with whom they could work? Yes. This in some ways is self-evident. In discussions, mentioned earlier, with participants at the “Rainbow Workshop” topics included how catastrophically workshops can fail; participants can leave and/or facilitators can be asked to leave. In comparison to those situations this project worked very well. Work was accomplished by participants who could not have done it when the project began. This is not to say that all participants liked all things at all times, but they did continue productive work.

Secondly, let us analyse the facilitator’s responsibilities. The primary responsibility of the facilitator was to help twelve adolescent who ranged in age from fourteen to seventeen to co-operate in a project that could examine situations relevant to them. Like most groups in popular theatre they arrived with at least one thing in common. In this case it was that they

all attended the same school. While they have other things in common, or they would not be at this particular school, that was never the subject of discussion, nor was there any effort on anyone's part to make it so.

The first session, like all sessions, began with an "opening circle," all participants and the facilitator sat on the floor and introduced themselves and discussed what they thought would follow or what they might like to do.

Throughout the project, group co-operation was created and expanded in order to overcome embarrassment, habits, lack of confidence or self-esteem and lack of trust in oneself or each other. To help lessen and overcome these issues, exercises and games which target one or more of them were used. These appear in the session plans as "themes" and the exercises address these issues. For example, the theme for the first night was "introduction and awareness". After the opening circle we played the "Atom Game": everyone walked around the space and tried to keep evenly dispersed throughout the room. The game can be varied by speed, eyes closed or in this case "walking through Jell-O." All of the variations lead to changes in the way people move, all the while trying to pay attention to how their body moved and what it felt like. The second game was "Sight and Sound." With the group in a circle, each person in turn made a gesture and a sound; then the rest of the group, one at a time, tried to copy it. These simple games help people to overcome their dislike, or embarrassment of making unusual gestures or sounds of which theatre is often composed. These exercises combined with others and discussions help to create an context wherein people feel this behaviour is acceptable and therefore neither embarrassing nor ridiculed.

This works well in theory; with adolescents, however, the process takes more time than with adults who tend to be more inhibited but less likely to ridicule each other.

Explanations and discussion are part of these exercises. After the first session I was given some advice from one of the senior Landmark teaching staff, who had attended to observe. It was suggested that these particular students understood directions (the methods of the exercise) better if they were given as needed, instead of one great long explanation. This advice would benefit any popular theatre group especially in the early stages. These explanations should include the point of the exercise as well as the rules. They can also include feelings or impressions to expect, and in many of the trust exercise, which include closed eyes or physical contact, safety concerns and strategies. Most of the directions for exercises include hand or arm positions that are either defensive; for example, with arms folded over the chest, or slightly extended at shoulder height. Much of the safety in these exercises is maintained by the facilitators as the participants may have their eyes closed or, in the case of adolescents, exhibit great exuberance or attitudes of immortality; for example, there were several suggestions to play “blind” games on the balcony in the auditorium.

After each exercise a circle would be formed and there was a discussion of the exercise. Initially comments were “that was weird,” or “I liked that.” However, part of the intent of the discussions was to create or refine vocabulary with which to discuss the exercises, and as the workshop continued comments became both more insightful and specific.

Another aspect of group work with adolescents is that they all talk at the same time. Hoping to avoid lectures on the subject I created “la, la, la.” This exercise entailed a short story of today’s activities told twice by each participant. The first time everyone else was

actively, though quietly, to ignore them. The second time participants gave their undivided attention. Several interesting results occurred: the more a teller “plowed” into their story, while being ignored, the more actively participants ignored them. The more tentative a teller, the less active the ignoring. Moreover, the more active the ignoring the more deadpan the story. During the discussion of what was different between the two renditions many participants noted that, yes, understanding improves with attention, but that the tellers told the stories with less hesitation and “um”s when people paid attention. “I realize how some of my teachers feel.” was one of the more telling remarks.

Making the facilitator obsolete in this project was more difficult than in a project with adults. Although the idea of the participants controlling the workshop themselves was explained explicitly, often when the situation was degrading into chaos, that was not enough. As a workshop progresses, and outside resources are acquired, groups start to possess the knowledge of exercises, games, presentation methods and other information allowing them to be more autonomous. In this case it also enabled them to explain the methods of games to some participants who had missed them due to absences when we played them the first time.

However, with all groups, adolescents especially, the facilitator may have to introduce or foster strategies so the participants are able to take control. In this project a balance had to be struck between letting the students control the agenda and keeping focus on theatre, video and the scenes they were creating. The first solution needed was one to stop everyone from talking at once. It was frustrating for the facilitators and the participants who were attempting to silence each other with phrases such as “shut-up,” “stop that,” “listen will ya,”

which often as not led to comebacks. Tessa Mendel, another facilitator with more experience mentioned having used the technique of a “code word”: a nondescript word that did not have the undertones of the ones we had been using. Each night someone would select a word for the night: “hamburger,” “mushroom,” “honk”. This proved to be very effective in the short term; often it created a chorus of “honk”s but it did bring everyone’s focus back to the task at hand and it rarely needed to be used by the facilitators. The technique was accepted so well that on several nights when we forgot to choose a word, someone, at a necessary point, during the course of the evening would spontaneously yell a word which everyone would assume was now the “code word” for the session, bring their focus to the task at hand and adopt the word for the rest of the evening without discussion.

A second technique, suggested by Fred Campbell, was that of the “time keeper”. As different aspects of an evenings work would run on, often because of shenanigans, less work could be accomplished. To help the participants take control of this, they began to democratically select activities (the facilitators also continued introducing new ones) and place time constraints on each activity. At the beginning of each session a “time keeper” was selected and given the stop watch and the responsibility for informing the participants how much time was left or stopping the activity. This was effective for two reasons; it focussed people’s minds on the growing urgency to keep working and it allowed them to comment on the priority of each of their activities without having to say, “let’s not do this,” or, “we do that too much.” One of the decisions was that opening circles were too long and were voted to last five or ten minutes in most sessions. As was often the case this created for the facilitators a contradiction between some of the aspects of the project that we considered important

and the fostering of a democratic and autonomous group. These techniques and the narrowing focus, towards the scenes, left the facilitators mostly with the tasks of helping to organize and keep the focus and pace of a session as well as giving suggestions, instead of being solely responsible. While I believe it is possible for a group such as this to become even more autonomous it would require more time than was available thereby fostering a greater understanding of the process and an ability to define goals more precisely.

The third aspect of a popular theatre project is the process itself. As mentioned earlier, there are six steps necessary to include in the process. Firstly, there is body awareness. Within this project exercises were used to encourage participants to experience the sensations of their bodies while engaged in activities. Exercises like the “Atom Game” where participants move around the stage as if it was full of Jell-O, gives them the opportunity both to imagine what it would feel like, how it would encumber their movement, as well as how it feels to move in that way. While Jell-O was evocative, it also proved disruptive as a concept: others ways of imagining the “thickening of air” might be advantageous. Other exercises such as “Blind Magnets,” “crab walk” or “the machine” (see Appendix B) encourage the participants to move in concert with others or in ways foreign to their everyday experience. By participating in these exercises people begin to understand the limited range of movement we usually employ and the incredible range of movement of which all are capable. This begins to turn the habitual into the optional which is in fact an exercise in self-control and self-determination as much as awareness.

This body work, becoming aware and expanding the range beyond the habitual, also continues in the second step: the work on images. Image work is important for two reasons:

the image is the basic unit of the visual nature of theatre and while we all create an image every time we move, in theatre we want a pure image devoid of the irrelevancies. To paraphrase Northrop Frye commenting on our everyday language versus prose, "...prose is our ordinary speech on its best behaviour..." (1963;18). Image in theatre then, is our everyday movement at its most aware.

Image work began in the first session with the "Sight and Sound" game. This game was played several times because of both absences and the lacklustre attempts in the initial stages of the workshop. Many of the participants were, in fact, more demonstrative in their movements in some of the scenes and in general than in some of the exercises. This seemed to be a function of self-consciousness. In the room they were just themselves, but during an exercise where they acted individually they felt singled out and on display, causing them to restrict their responses; however, this effect of the exercises diminished as the workshop progressed. The workshop moved from these initial image exercises to more complex ones involving "sculpture". In these exercises participants sculpt each other into statues and then combine their statues into interactive groups. In this way the participants learn that each image can be connected to others which then tell a story. At this point the story is more evocative than a precise exchange of ideas.

Concurrent with this work we began story telling in sub-groups as a way to generate stories for scene work. It was initially difficult to get the participants to tell stories other than those spawned by Hollywood. My insistence that the stories be related to, or from the experience of, the participant's lives was not as effective, and somewhat less democratic, in

moving us away from Hollywood as was Fred's idea that the stories could be fiction, but had to be believable.

One story was selected by each sub-group and acted out as a skit for the other. This continued over several of the later sessions as stories came forth and were reduced to three with which to continue the work. From the beginning, these scenes were video taped, by the group not presenting the scene, in the "Oprah" format. This format had two, sometimes three interviewers, "Oprahs", and began when the scene was over. Everyone would sit and the "Oprahs" would introduce the show and begin interviewing participants first as characters and then as actors. The three scenes that eventually were recorded as the presentation were, "What Goes Around Comes Around", "Blow up the School", "A Night Out." As the process of refining these three scenes progressed, the "Oprah" format spawned a number of very insightful discussions.

"What Goes Around Comes Around" was a scene about siblings, younger than the participants, arguing over the television. They are chided by their parents and eventually sent to their rooms while the parents take their places at the television and the whole scene repeats with the roles reversed and the children sending the parents to their room. The interviews of the characters usually dealt with fairness to each other and the appropriate behaviour of children and parents. The interview of the actors generated interesting discussions of family dynamics: as one participant said: "Well, parents aren't parents any more, they're friends or something." Whether or not this story is true or accurate for any of the participants who created the scene is not known; however, it is a product of their perceptions.

“Blow up the School,” began with two students of Landmark East School being brought into the office after having been caught kissing in the locker room. They are in the process of being disciplined when, coincidentally, the “mad bomber” bursts in threatening to blow up the school. The principal tries to bribe him in several ways while the recently disciplined students encourage the “mad bomber” to blow up the school. The principal fails, after offering extra desserts, cash, and to close the school for an extended period, and the bomber throws his bomb and everyone runs. The “Oprahs” then enter the scene and the interviews begin. Each of these scenes was run five or more times and all generated discussions. “Blow up the School” usually resulted in a discussion of school rules. In one session all the actors were asked which rule they would change if they could change only one. Responses included being allowed to kiss, having food in the dorms, and being allowed to make the rules. At one point in this discussion “Oprah” asked Mr. H. this question, but it spontaneously became, “What rule would you add?” When he responded that there were some rules he too would like to remove there were a number of surprised faces.

“A Night Out” begins as a group of students sneak out of the school dorm and go down to the bar to have drinks (with no need for I.D.). They proceed to get “falling down drunk” and sick and then sneak back into their dorm, almost but not getting caught, both leaving and returning. The “Oprahs” that followed this scene often led to a continuing discussion with both Mr. H. and the facilitators almost speechless. “Well. You drink!” was one of the lines directed at all of us. It was an uncomfortable position. Throughout this project we had tried to be honest in our responses and not shirk difficult questions by using age or maturity as an excuse. But yes we drink; we enjoyed drinking; we had done a lot of

what they were hoping to do, being grown-up enough to drink. The best we could do was to keep the consequences at the forefront of the discussion.

The night that the recording of the “product” occurred was a scene from *Bedlam*. Some participants brought costumes and props and the energy level was much higher than it had ever been. Opening credits were drawn on the easel and all manner of furniture became set pieces for the scenes. The scenes were presented and the “Oprahs” interviewed the actors and participants. Unfortunately, very little insightful discussion took place. There had been earlier versions of the scenes which led to stilted or less-fruitful discussions but few were as unproductive as the scenes recorded that night. At the end of the evening Fred and I looked at each other and said: “What was that?” Our conclusion was that the participants had decided to take control in their own way, when nothing could be done to change whatever they did. We congratulated ourselves in a somewhat blackly humorous way. Fred remarked that when he gave the tape of the evenings performance to the students he got the impression that they finally understood it was their project to do with as they wished and maybe had been all along.

The truly unfortunate result of that evening was that the school destroyed the tape. When I asked Mr. H. what their reasoning was, he said they felt that the content was inappropriate. In fairness to the school we had seen the whole process and they had seen only what amounted to the least inspired evening of scene work; but in many ways it was not the administrators’ to destroy. There was no attempt to contact me to discuss their concerns about the project or the content of the presentation.

The fifth step of reviewing the process and presentation was in many instances included within the project itself. Discussion of exercises and refining the games and exercises occurred as part of the process, as well as adjusting the project to the participants liking. This reflection, however, needs to be refined more for a workshop with adolescents because of several reasons. They would rather do something than be reflective about it; they still need more guidance than adults; and there constantly exists a contradiction between some of that guidance and the desire to create a democratic and autonomous group.

I talked with the group the next week and got the some of their impressions: they seemed less disappointed about the destruction of the tape than I was. Comments ranged from "That was fun", to "I wanted to do a horror show." It had been planned that after some time had passed I would go back to do a fuller follow-up, after the participants had some to reflect on the project, but this did not occur due to other considerations.

The sixth step, that of recording the project, has been accomplished in two significant ways. Firstly, there are the video tapes around which much of this project revolved. Though they are not widely available, a compilation of them could be made if they were of interest to another group or facilitator. Secondly, there is this thesis which has within it the exercises and session plans which enable it to be used as a resource for someone attempting a similar project. The benefit of this thesis as an academic document is that it may help in a small way to raise the legitimacy of popular theatre thereby subjecting it to more scrutiny and hopefully helping to develop it further.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has looked at the process of popular theatre. The focus has been on recent developments because of the desire to extend the theory beyond the desire for a universal method or the creation of surrogate story tellers. Mainstream theatre has created boundaries that have excluded a lot of good theatre in the name of art. Popular theatre can avoid this problem.

If popular theatre is to grow beyond its present state then theory must include what practice has informed us is valuable, but also lead to new attempts at solutions. The work of Böal, the Mummer's Troupe and Sistren have created new methods which have proved beneficial to the groups with whom they work, and have provided other groups with inspiration and information to help in the struggle as people recreate their "stations" into "locales".

Personal experience with Augusto Böal has proven that when the process becomes more important than the people the results will be at best a failure if not a disaster. Many of the problems in our society are caused by people being forced to fit into "stations". Turning "locale" building techniques such as popular theatre into "station" building techniques will not create a solution.

From the work of both the Mummer's Troupe and Sistren, as well as the project with the students of Landmark East School it can be seen that the commitment to the people is absolutely necessary. From Sistren's greater success through lasting change it can be seen that involving the people in their own struggle is one assurance that it will not cease.

It is difficult to judge what effects these two groups have had on their societies. One thing is certain; the women who make up Sistren are more capable of running their lives than they were before they began working with popular theatre. There is no such similar record of the success of the Mummer's Troupe. This is not to say that the Mummer's Troupe was unsuccessful, only that their goals, or at least their methods, were shorter term. This argument reinforces the belief that when the people have the tools and opportunity to tell their own stories popular theatre can be effective as an instrument for social change.

It is not enough to tell people's stories for them. The people who dominate our societies must see that the people whom they dominate are people and they too have stories worth telling and being heard. If the world can only be changed ten people at a time, then that is how it will have to be changed. For all things there are perceived limits and real limits; the need is to discover which are which and go beyond those which can be gone beyond. Popular theatre must move beyond universal methods into the underlying principles and beyond surrogate story tellers until the owners and tellers are one.

With respect to the Landmark East School project this thesis clearly shows it was a successful at applying the ideas discussed in this thesis. Two shortcomings however, do present themselves: the need for a better follow-up and the fact that adolescents and autonomy proved to be a difficult mix.

The project did contain methods for reflection within it as well as strategies for altering the format and fostering democratic control of the project as it progressed; both are important to make sure the problem of universal application is avoided. While these are necessary for the intrinsic methods of the study, the extrinsic benefit to the facilitator or to

any subsequent project, as well as to this thesis, would have been greatly enhanced by a more complete follow-up: one that included participants, and more school staff.

The other shortcoming, that of adolescent autonomy versus parental guidance, has a much less clear solution. Undoubtedly my initial trepidation, that a project with adolescents might be more difficult than a facilitator with little experience could manage, proved well founded. There was, at times, a discontinuity in the progression of ideas and techniques, undoubtedly leading to some of the chaos of which there was sometimes a great deal. There were also times I felt utterly lost and therefore thankful for a co-facilitator who seemed to notice this and take over. These problems were especially true in the early stages of the study when the participants were least able to direct themselves. While all of these problems may have been lessened in a study with adults, the fact that the participants were adolescents did, however, lead to a more rigorous test of the process and its underlying theory; and this thesis is stronger for it.

Within the project the participants enjoyed as much autonomy as possible while still working on the creation of a productive project. Their autonomy was limited; however, further increasing their autonomy would have decreased the effectiveness of the group. I am, however, not very fond of that fact and solutions to it need to be found. This dichotomy illustrates the difference between true "locale" building and the creation of what amounts to a sympathetic "station". In other words between the participants creating whatever they desire of the project and the facilitator helping to create an appropriate "locale"; which really amounts to another "station". This problem does, however, lead to one very important cautionary note. The juxtaposition of autonomy and democratic methods with need for

parental-type guidance of adolescents observed in this project may serve as a warning to other facilitators. It should not be present to such an extent in projects with adult participants.

Popular theatre strives to help people find their own voice. How it does this was summed up best by one participant of this study who said: "It was nice to be someone else, you know, so I could say some of those things."

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APPENDIX A
SESSION PLANS

Session No. 1

Date: Tuesday, Jan. 6, 1994

Themes: Introduction and Awareness

Introduction: Opening circle

The group sits in a circle for an introduction and discussion: who each of us is, what we hope to accomplish in the project, how we will go about it. In the case of subsequent nights, a review of previous work, thoughts and feelings are usually held. Participants usually pass an object around the circle and speak only when they have it, thereby avoiding the problem of talking suppressing listening.

A "name game" can be played so that everyone becomes familiar with each other's names. This may be less necessary in this project since the participants are already acquainted

Warm-up: Atom Game

Purpose: To break down physical barriers and to create a sense of group interaction, as well as to create an awareness of the space around a person, and as a physical warm-up.

Body: Sight and Sound

Purpose: To help people overcome self-consciousness within the group and to break habits of movement and voice. While a person can do something habitual, each person must also mimic the others.

Closing circle: The end of the session is similar to the beginning. A circle is formed to discuss the work and the feelings of the participants. Work for the next session can also be discussed.

Session No. 2**Date: January 11, 1994****Themes: Group Interaction and Problem Solving****Introduction: Opening circle**

The group sits in a circle for a discussion and a review of previous work, thoughts and feelings. The discussion will include the options of the work for the evening.

Warm-up: Gordian Knot

Purpose: This gives the group a common goal which requires the entire group to solve while they pass control of the group from person to person as each part of the knot becomes the focus of the group. It also expands the usual range of movement for the participants: contortion might be an appropriate word here.

Body: The Machine

Purpose: To foster a sense of interaction through rhythm in the creation of a group image.

Closing circle

Session No. 3

Date: January 13, 1994

Themes: Trust & Image

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Blind Cars

Purpose: Trust in individuals within the group.

Body: Pinhole camera

Purpose: To use a mental picture of an image to recreate it. Using image to communicate.

Closing circle

Session No. 4

Date: January 18, 1994

Themes: Trust & Movement Habits

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Running of the Bulls

Purpose: Trust in individuals within the group.

Body: Face and Hand

Purpose: Awareness of another, co-operation in movement and moving in unconventional ways: breaking movement habits.

Closing circle

Session No. 5

Date: January 20, 1994

Themes: Group trust & Body awareness

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Cork on the Ocean

Purpose: Trust in members of the group as a group.

Body: Living Clay

Purpose: To use body senses to control movement and to be able to sense the position of one's body without looking. It is also the beginning of understanding the power an image has to communicate.

Closing circle

Session No. 6

Date: January 25, 1994

Themes: Trust and story telling

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Cork on the ocean

Purpose: To help individuals foster trust in and responsibility for each other.

Story telling: On the beach

Purpose: To learn to co-operate in telling a story as well as to learn to improvise in a creative way.

Closing circle

Session No. 7

Date: January 27, 1994

Themes: Trust and Images

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Image Tag

Purpose: This game was adapted because of the participants desire to play frozen tag and the facilitators desire to keep the focus on theatre. It gives the opportunity to see an image and recreate it. At least in theory: it needs refinement.

Trust: Blind Cars

Purpose: As in session No. 2 It was repeated due to the fact it was popular and several participants were absent in session No. 2.

Image: Charades

Purpose: This too was a compromise between participant and the facilitator but it was helpful in pointing out the communication possible with image. Some participants played in pairs which served the more tentative well in overcoming stage fright.

Closing circle

Session No. 8

Date: February 1, 1994

Theme: Image

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Cat and Dog

Purpose: warm-up.

Body: Sculpting

Purpose: To change habits of movement and to tell a story with images.

Closing circle

Session No. 9

Date: February 8, 1994

Theme: Image

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Image Tag

Image work: Complete the image

Purpose: to create a dynamic story with images.

Closing circle

Session No. 10

Date: February 10, 1994

Themes: Co-operation and listening

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Fox in the Hole

Purpose: A non threatening physical contact game and a good warm up especially for adolescents.

Blind Chicks

Purpose: A blind trust game, involving the need to listen closely.

Body: Sculptures

Purpose: To break participants of posture and movement habits

Closing circle

Session No. 11

Date: February 15, 1994

Themes: Rhythm and Co-operation

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Atom Game

Purpose: As a review of sensing the space around us. Used here before blind magnets as a comparison of space as seen and space as felt.

Blind Magnets

Purpose: To use senses other than vision to detect others and to co-operate in moving together.

Scenes: The group picks a subject and creates an improvisation .

Purpose: To show participants that they can make a scene based on little more than an idea.

Closing circle

Session No.12

Date: February 17, 1994

Themes: Perception and Scene work

Introduction: Opening Circle

Warm-up: Image Tag

Purpose: This game was adapted because of the participants desire to play frozen tag and the facilitators desire to keep the focus on theatre. It gives the opportunity to see an image and recreate it. At least in theory: It needs refinement.

Blind Vampires

Purpose: To sense other people without vision.

Scenes: "Oprah" using scenes created by story telling.

Closing circle

Session No.13

Date: February 22, 1994

Theme: Image

Introduction: Opening Circle

Warm-up: Running of the Bulls

Purpose: Trust in oneself and other group members.

Image: Sculptures

Purpose: To break participants of posture and movement habits.

Closing circle

Session No.14**Date: February 24, 1994****Themes: Rhythm and Scene work****Introduction: Opening circle****Warm-up: Cat and Mouse****Purpose: Warm-up****Rhythm: Westside Story****Purpose: To foster a sense of group rhythm and change movement habits.****Scene work: "Oprah" with created scenes.****Closing circle**

Session No.15

Date: March 1, 1994

Themes: Movement and Rhythm

Introduction: Opening circle

Warm-up: Crab walk

Purpose: to use the body in unfamiliar ways.

Body: West-Side Story

Purpose: To foster a sense of group rhythm and change movement habits

Scene work: "Oprah": with created scenes

Closing circle

Session No.16

Date: March 3, 1994

Theme: Image and storytelling

Introduction: Opening Circle

Warm-up: Sitting in a Circle

purpose: to co-operate in a task that takes group communication and rhythm.

Scene work: The Classroom Game

Purpose: Creating images that tell a story.

“Oprah” with created scenes

Closing circle

Session No.17

Date: March 8, 1994

Theme: Image and Storytelling

Introduction: Opening Circle

Warm-up: Image Tag

Purpose: This game was adapted because of the participants desire to play frozen tag and the facilitators desire to keep the focus on theatre. It gives the opportunity to see an image and recreate it. At least in theory, it needs refinement.

Story Telling: The participants split into three groups and told stories to each other, then each sub-group selected one to tell the whole group.

Purpose: At this point the group was losing the purpose of the scenes: to tell a story. A review seemed necessary.

Closing circle

Session No.18

Date: March 10, 1994

Theme: Scene work

Introduction: Opening Circle

Warm-up:

Scene Work: “Oprah”

Closing circle

The next six session were entirely scene work with quick warm-ups due to the feeling that we were running out of time to complete the work.

APPENDIX B

EXERCISE DESCRIPTIONS

Many of these games and exercises have been discovered in workshops or conversation with other people engaged in popular theatre: it remains a word-of-mouth community. Others have come from Augusto Böal, he has, I am sure, picked up many in a similar fashion. For the purposes of this thesis I have cited Böal as the source, not because I am sure has created all of them but because he has published many of them in several books which are now a resource to all facilitators working in popular theatre. Most can be found in *Games for Actors and non-actors* (Böal, 1992) although at the time of this study I was unaware of its existence and my sources were a hodge-podge of conversations and descriptions and memories of workshops as well as theatre training in an undergraduate degree.

I have categorised these games and exercises into four groups, although some fit into more than one category, each game predominantly relates to the category in which it has been placed, but not exclusively.

GAMES OF TRUST

Running of the Bulls

Purpose: Trust in individuals within the group and over coming the fear of the unknown

Method: The group lines up twenty feet from one person, the catcher. In turn, and with eyes closed, each person runs toward the catcher who gently catches them. Mats can be very useful in this exercise. (Böal, 1992,112) “The Goalkeeper”

Cork on the Ocean

Purpose: Trust in members of the group as a group.

Method: The group forms a very close circle with one of the participants in the centre, if the group is large it may need to split, this person keeps their body rigid while he or she falls over. They are supported by the rest of the group as he or she is pushed back and forth across and around the circle. This process is repeated for all the participants of the group (Böal, 1992,67) “Joe Egg”

GAMES OF AWARENESS

Atom Game

Purpose: To foster an awareness of the space around a person and their interaction with others.

Method 1: The participants move freely around the room trying to fill the entire space equally, no crowded or empty spaces. The facilitator has them move at different speeds and in different ways. Periodically the facilitator has the group freeze to see if they have filled the space evenly.

Variation: The facilitator can have the participants form groups of specific numbers when they freeze, by calling out the number desired . The leader can also specify how the groups are to connect to each other, i.e., nose to back, elbows to knees (Böal, 1992,116). “Without Leaving Empty a Single Space in the Room”

Blind Cars

Purpose: Trust in individuals within the group.

Method: People choose partners. One partner closes his or her eyes. The sighted person gently taps their finger on the back of the "car." When the car feels the partner's finger they move forward. When the driver wishes to make the car move faster he or she taps the car faster; to stop the car they remove their finger from the car's back. If the driver wants the car to turn left or right the driver moves his or her finger to that side of the back of the car. The car is driven all around the room. The driver must be careful to avoid collisions with his or her car. After five or ten minutes the partners switch roles (Böal, 1992,111) “The Blind Car”

Blind Vampires

Purpose: To use senses other than vision to find or avoid people.

Method: Participants roam around the room with their eyes closed, arms close to the body and try to avoid each other. The facilitator gently pinches someone on the neck. This person screams and is the first vampire. Each person pinched by the vampire becomes a vampire and tries to convert more people.

Variation: If a vampire pinches another vampire that person screams happily and is converted back into a person (Böal, 1992, 110). “The Vampire of Strasbourg”

GAMES OF CO-OPERATION

Gordian Knot

Purpose: This gives the group a common goal which requires the entire group to solve. While passing control of the group from person to person as each part of the knot becomes the focus of the group. It also expands the usual range of movement for the participants. Contortion might be an appropriate word here. It does not always have a perfect solution.

Method: The group stands in the middle of the room and the facilitator asks them to each hold the hand of another person, then asks them to hold the hand of a third person. The goal is now to unravel the knot they have created and become an inward facing circle with hands still held (Böal, 1992,67) “Circle of Knots”

Sitting In a Circle

Purpose: To foster a sense of co-operation in a common goal.

Method: The participants stand in a very tight circle facing the back of the person in front of them. At the same time they slowly begin to sit on the lap of the person behind them. Once accomplished the circle can walk around the room. This becomes much harder with less than eight people (Böal,1992,79) “The Chair”

GAMES OF MOVEMENT AND RHYTHM AND IMAGE

Image Tag

Purpose: It is a good warm up it just needs a better connect to theatre. It contains concepts of varied movements and frozen images.

Method: This is frozen tag. In a concession to participants who wanted to play this we added the idea that players must freeze into an image based on a theme they select. We tried having to free people by making a complimentary image but this idea needs refining.

Cat and Mouse

Purpose: Warm-up and personal space

Method: Another tag game where partners stand side by side with arms linked. One participant, the cat, chases another, the mouse. When the mouse wants safety it links arms with one of the pairs in the room. The person not linked to the mouse in this threesome becomes the mouse and the chase begins again.

Variation: When the mouse links arms with one of the partner the person opposite the mouse becomes a dog and the chase begins with the cat as prey (Böal,1992,119)

Fox in the Hole

Purpose: this is warm-up but can also help people who do not like to be touched or do not like people in their personal space as this tends to be non-threatening contact.

Method: Partners stand face to face with arms on each other's shoulders. A fox and a mouse are selected and they begin to play tag. When a mouse wants safety it runs in between a pair of partners and faces one of the partners. The partner behind the mouse now becomes the mouse. If the fox catches the mouse their roles are reversed and the game continues.

Sight and Sound

Purpose: To help participants overcome self-consciousness within the group and to break habits of movement and voice. While a person can do something habitual, each person must also mimic the others.

Method: The group forms a circle. One person makes a gesture (pose) and a sound at the same time. Each member of the group, in turn, mimics the first person. The game continues until everyone has created an image for the group to mimic.

The Machine

Purpose: To foster a sense of interaction in the creation of a group image and to get participants to listen to each other and react in "harmony."

Method: One person begins by making a repetitive action in front of the group. When a member of the group believes that they have a motion that fits into the action he or she joins the "machine". This goes on until all the participants have become part of the machine at this point each participant in turn steps out to look at what has been created and then resumes her or his place(Böal,1992,90) "The Machine of Rhythms"

West-side Story

Purpose: To foster a sense of group rhythm and to create and copy spontaneous images.

Method: Two groups face each other in a line. A member of one makes a gesture and sound and takes step toward the other group. The participants copy the gesture and sound and back the other group across the room. When one group has its back to the wall a member of that group creates a gesture and sound and marches the first group back across the room. The game continues until everyone has created a gesture and sound (Böal, 1992,93).

Face and Hand

Purpose: Awareness of another, co-operation in movement and moving in unconventional ways: breaking movement habits.

Method: Participants in the group select a partner. One person puts their hand in front of the other's face, about six inches away, and the other person follows the hand keeping the distance constant (Böal, 1994, 63) "Columbian Hypnosis."

Sculptures

Purpose: To create individual sculptures and assemble them into a scene.

Method: Half the group mould their partner into a sculpture and then move them together and adjust them to form a scene. When done the sculptors replace the sculptures so they can see the scene from the outside. Then the roles are reversed and it begins again (Böal, 1992,129). "The Sculptor Touches the Model"

Complete the Image

Purpose: to create dynamic image that tells a story.

Method: One person makes an image in a circle surrounded of the other participants. When another person feels they can complete the image he or she steps in and does so. They pause while everyone looks at the new image and then the first person returns to the circle and a third person completes the image of the second person who remains in the circle. This continues until everyone has been in the circle (Böal, 1992,130).

Living Clay

Purpose: To use body senses to control movement and to be able to sense the position of one's body without looking. It is also the beginning of understanding the power an image has to communicate.

Method: Two people stand. A third person moulds them into a scene (an image that implies a relationship). The group looks at the image and tries to understand what has been created.

Each group of three does this and then they switch sculptors and repeat the process. After all the participants have been both sculptor and sculpture the process begins again. The second time, the sculptor creates an image as the beginning of a scene and a second image as the end and the clay creates the movements in between.

Pinhole Camera

Purpose: To see and recreate an image

Method: The group forms two lines that face each other. One line closes their eyes while the other creates images. The first line blinks their eyes open for a split-second and tries to copy the image made by the person across from them. When they say they are done they open their eyes and see how exact a copy has been made. Then the roles are reversed (Böal, 1992, 120)

The Classroom Game

Purpose: to tell a story with an image and to discuss an environment, i.e., the classroom, office.

Method: This grew out of an improvised scene of students in a classroom. One participant plays the teacher in a (usually) chaotic classroom while trying to maintain order. If need be she sends an offending student to the office (a space outside the scene) where the student must create a sculpture of the behaviour that caused them to be expelled. When all the students have been expelled or when the teacher cannot deal with the class anymore, she picks a new teacher. Before the scene begins again the sculptured students are examined and quickly discussed. The game resumes with the new teacher.

While these participants created a classroom, the workplace or home could also be used. This game should be considered a work in progress and in need of some refinement.

OTHER CONCEPTS USED IN THIS PROJECT

“Oprah”

Purpose: To create a critical discussion of a scene within a popular theatre or video project

Method: After a scene has been created and run, several participants begin interviewing first the characters and then the participants in the format of a television talk show. Questions can include feelings, motivations and impressions first of each other as characters and then as participants where more critical questions can be generated and discussed. (Fred Campbell and Youth for Social Justice).

Code Word

Purpose: To help a group, especially adolescents, be autonomous and focussed.

Method: A participant selects a word to call attention to the fact that the group is getting unruly or off topic. The word should be as banal as possible to avoid the defensiveness that words and phrases like "shut-up," "pay attention," or "stop that," may create (Tessa Mendel).

Timekeeper

Purpose: Another strategy for group autonomy and focus: especially useful for adolescents.

Method: Each session a timekeeper is selected. She or he is given a stop watch and is responsible for monitoring the time designated for an activity. The times are set by a democratic procedure at the beginning of each session. Initially this is difficult because participants do not know how long exercises should take (Fred Campbell and Youth for Social Justice).